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DE RUEHKH #1798/01 3230813
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
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FM AMEMBASSY KHARTOUM
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 9213
INFO RUCNFUR/DARFUR COLLECTIVE IMMEDIATE
RHMFISS/CJTF HOA IMMEDIATE

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 KHARTOUM 001798

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FOR SANFORD
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E.O. 12958: DECL: 11/17/2012

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SUBJECT: AS SLM FRAYS, MINAWI STANDS BY POSITION ON UN/AU
TALKS, CALLS SPLM UNREALIABLE

REF: KHARTOUM 1785

Classified By: CDA Alberto Fernandez, Reason: Sections 1.4 (b) and (d)

Summary

¶1. (C) Despite NCP demands to the contrary, SLM leader Minni Minawi insists that his movement will only participate in the UN/AU-led Darfur peace process as a signatory to the DPA and not as a member of the Government delegation. Secretary General Mustafa Tirab defied the SLM's official position by traveling to Libya with the Government, Minawi said, further fraying the already weakened the movement. Minawi hopes to effect a "smooth transition" to remove Tirab from his post by mid-December. He underscored that the SLM wants to play a positive role in the peace process and cited his recent efforts to encourage one JEM faction to participate in the Sirte talks. Reluctant to take a strong position on the political confrontation between the NCP and the SPLM, Minawi characterized the SPLM as an unreliable partner that has done little to support the SLM or to engage in a solution to the Darfur crisis. Post will follow-up on UN Chief Mediator Taye Brook Zerioun's suggestion to assist the SLM in drafting a legally sound statement outlining its position regarding its status in the UN/AU peace process. End summary.

SLM Position on Peace Talks Remains Firm

¶2. (C) Senior Assistant to the President and Sudan Liberation Movement (SLM) leader Minni Minawi continues to insist that the SLM be represented in the Darfur peace process as a signatory to the Darfur Peace Agreement (DPA) and not as a member of the Government of National Unity's (GNU) delegation, as the National Congress Party (NCP) demands. Meeting with Poloff on November 17, Minawi said that senior NCP officials, including Presidential Assistant Nafie Ali Nafie and Director General of the National Intelligence and Security Service (NISS) Salah Ghosh, have rebuffed his requests for consultations to resolve the impasse. He claimed that by blocking the SLM's participation in the peace process and fomenting internal fissures in the movement, the NCP is trying to push Minawi to withdraw from the GNU so that it can conclude a new agreement with the DPA non-signatories.

¶3. (C) The SLM remains committed to playing a constructive role in the peace process, asserted Minawi. In the weeks leading up to Sirte talks, he visited Justice and Equality Movement/Collective Leadership's (JEM/CL) Bahar Idriss Abu Gharda and Abdullah Banda in North Darfur to urge their

adherence to a ceasefire and to press them to participate in negotiations. While claiming some credit for their eventual decision to attend the Sirte talks, Minawi said that he was disappointed by reports that JEM/CL was involved in the October attack on the AU Mission in Sudan (AMIS) group site near Haskanita. SLM sources in the field have observed JEM/CL fighters with AMIS trucks and uniforms, though Abu Gharda denied these reports when Minawi confronted him (other sources have fingered SLM/Unity for the Haskanita attack).

Yet Internal SLM Fissures Laid Bare

14. (C) The dispute over the SLM's representation during the recent Sirte peace talks has further frayed the already weakened movement. Despite the SLM's official stance, Secretary General Mustafa Tirab arrived in Sirte with the NCP

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delegation. According to Minawi, Tirab's insubordination is the culmination of a pattern of disloyalty as he has edged closer to the NCP. (Note: During the August meeting of the Revolutionary Leadership Council, the SLM's premier governing body, Tirab attempted to engineer Minawi's dismissal as SLM chairman. End note.) While Minawi acknowledged that senior SLM officials, including those based in Darfur, have called for Tirab's immediate removal, Minawi said that he wanted a "smooth transition" to a new secretary general to minimize Tirab's ability to split the movement. The next Revolutionary Leadership Council in December will provide an opportunity to replace Tirab, said Minawi.

15. (C) The SLM leadership is under increasing pressure to deliver a tangible benefit to its supporters, explained Minawi, making many SLM members susceptible to NCP

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manipulation and to the rallying call of the DPA non-signatory rebel factions. The field commanders in particular are growing impatient with the glacial pace of DPA implementation and, in the absence of any mechanism for sustaining themselves, are demanding jobs or livelihood assistance. The recent defection of 20 SLM commanders in South Darfur to SLM/Unity exemplifies this trend, according to Minawi. Questioning the international community's strategy for bringing Darfur's rebel movements into a peace process, Minawi asked "if one faction (the SLM) can't stabilize, how can the others?"

Doubts on SPLM Commitment to Darfur, SLM

16. (C) Though desiring greater cooperation with the Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM), Minawi is reticent to take a firm position in the SPLM's ongoing political confrontation with the NCP. The SPLM has been an unreliable partner within the GNU, he said, rarely supporting SLM efforts to empower itself in Khartoum. Minawi recalled that the SPLM had remained silent--in public and during meetings of the Presidency and the Council of Ministers--when Government security services attacked SLM facilities in Khartoum in March, killing ten SLM members. First Vice President Salva Kiir has yet to accept Minawi's numerous invitations to visit Darfur (something we have also encouraged Kiir to do).

17. (C) Minawi said that the absence of encouragement from the SPLM and its half-hearted engagement on Darfur--despite its aspirations as a national political force--have left him cynical about its motives. "Even if the SPLM came to us now, I don't think we could trust them because they would drop us if it helped them," he said. Despite these frustrations, Minawi has told the NCP that it must either work with the SPLM or accept the division of the country. In a recent

meeting with Nafie, Minawi suggested that the NCP endorse Kiir as its presidential candidate for the 2008 elections or "just give up" on the timetable leading toward the 2011 referendum because Southern secession would be a foregone conclusion. (Note: In a November 18 meeting with PolCouns and Poloff, SPLM Secretary General for the Northern Sector Yassir Arman said that the SPLM had recently appointed a commission to coordinate with the SLM. End note.)

Comment

18. (C) Given that the NCP has refused to negotiate with the SLM on its participation in the UN/AU peace process, Post supports the suggestion of UN Chief Mediator and deputy head of the UN Mission in Sudan (UNMIS) Taye Brooke Zerihoun, reported reftel, to provide discrete assistance to Minawi in preparing a legally sound public statement of the SLM position emphasizing: 1) Its commitment to the UN/AU peace process and 2) Its right to be represented independently from the GOS as a signatory to the DPA (since the DPA has not been implemented/ratified). Post will discuss this approach with the SLM's legal counsel and forward a draft statement to Washington for consideration. While the NCP claims it will withdraw from the peace process if the SLM is represented outside the Government delegation, we view this threat as a likely bluff. The NCP made the same threat during the Sirte talks when the SPLM observers refused to sit with the Government delegation but later relented. End comment.
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